

Statement of Congressman Ron Kind
H.Res. 627 - Deploring the abuse of persons in the United States custody in Iraq
May 6, 2004

Mr Chairman, the acts of abuse against Iraqi prisoners by American service members are abhorrent and sad. This is not behavior reflective of American values; it not behavior that helps our cause, and it is not behavior that will be tolerated. Thorough investigations need to root out those responsible, directly and indirectly, for this unlawful conduct no matter how high up the chain of command it goes. Those responsible must be held accountable for their actions.

Congress needs to be highly involved in investigating the actions of abuse at Abu Ghraib prison and the conditions and circumstances that led these abuses. Reports show that the military was well aware of the situation and conducting its own investigations for months prior to the release of the photos at Abu Ghraib now circulating through the world media. The failure of the Administration to keep Congress informed of the extent and seriousness of prisoner abuse, and the photos documenting it, is unacceptable.

Further, Congress must address and investigate the role of private security forces in Iraq. These forces, which constitute the second largest army in Iraq and account for over 40% of all contracting costs in Iraq, are outside the U.S. chain of command. The ability to hold these individuals accountable for their actions under law is questionable.

We must not lose focus, however, that the over 300,000 U.S. military personnel who have served and are serving in Iraq are doing an honorable job under difficult and dangerous conditions. While the Department of Defense investigation into the actions and conduct of the abuses at Abu Ghraib list a number of officers and enlisted personnel who failed to perform their duties as required, it also notes a number of officers and enlisted personnel who acted honorably and reported abuses up the chain of command. When I visited Iraq in October, 2003, I met with many honorable troops, including soldiers from western Wisconsin, who were performing their mission with outstanding commitment and professionalism. The abuses at Abu Ghraib serve only to cloud the accomplishments and sacrifices of our troops and put honorable U.S. service members in greater danger.

Mr. Chairman, perception matters when trying to execute our foreign policy and especially a military mission. We are dangerously losing the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people and the rest of the Arab world, and the abuses at the Abu Ghraib prison serve only to exacerbate this unfortunate reality. We must reinforce to the international community through our words and our actions that the United States is committed to helping the Iraqi people prosper in a free society.